

Message

From: Alex Bard [abard124@uw.edu]
Sent: 3/30/2018 1:10:27 AM
To: Pruitt, Scott [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=757bedfd70ca4219b6d8046f5ce5681e-Pruitt, Sco]
Subject: "Secret" science

Dear Administrator Pruitt-

As a scientist and a concerned citizen, I am writing to ask some questions about your recent remarks regarding "secret" and "sound" science, and to raise some concerns about what appears to be a pattern of a lack of respect for science and scientists from the highest levels of an agency that ostensibly exists to protect the environment.

Firstly, you seem very concerned about "secret" science, and in some sense, there is a shared concern for openness in methods and data in the scientific community as well. I applaud your concern for reproducibility in science, but I think your approach is misguided and perhaps better left to experts. By ignoring any science that doesn't make public the entire cache of unedited raw data or does not meet the requirements of the "Honest" act, it would preclude the use, for example, of any public health data that contains personal information about the study's subjects, any experiment that uses proprietary technology or methods, or any study that literally cannot be ethically reproduced, such as data collection after a natural disaster such as an oil spill. This is sound science, and there are ways of reproducing it or statistically verifying it using other methods or other subjects. A one-size-fits-all approach is not practical and it requires the EPA to ignore a lot of good data.

Of course, there are those who would argue that the whole point of this is, in fact, to allow the EPA to ignore a lot of good data. I can't imagine that that could be true though. How could anybody whose job it is to protect the environment want to ignore data that would allow them to do a better job of protecting the environment? They wouldn't want to make their job harder. So it would be in the best interest of anybody who is faithfully attempting to protect the environment to make use of as much data as possible. Furthermore, it is simply unimaginable that somebody whose job it is to protect the environment would ignore scientists, including such prestigious organizations as the AAAS and the Association of American Universities--whose job it is to interpret data--when they caution him about how his regulations on data use can lead to ideological cherry-picking, which is why I'm confident that you will take these concerns to heart and rethink your policy. Surely anybody whose job it is to protect the environment would listen to people who are experts on protecting the environment. And surely you would like to protect the environment. It is your job, after all. You were confirmed by 52 US Senators, who clearly believed that you were up to the task. If you don't believe in environmental protection, surely you would not have accepted the job, and if you had since found that science is outside your wheelhouse and you were not able to appropriately interpret the science that is required for your job, surely you would have resigned, as the environment is far too important to allow pride to interfere with its continued protection. So I don't know what I'm missing, but somehow none of these things are getting done, yet you are still on the job. It is your choice whether you would like to accomplish these these things or whether you would like to resign, but "none of the above" is not an acceptable choice. Your job is far too important for that.

Administrator Pruitt, I don't think you would disagree with my assertion that you are not a scientist. There is nothing wrong with that; there are many people with valid opinions on environmental protection who are not scientists. But if you're going to lead an agency tasked with protecting the environment without being a scientist yourself, then you're going to have to listen to scientists when their area of expertise comes up in policy. If you're not willing to do that, please allow somebody who is willing to do that to take your job. I'm sure there are several oil companies that would be thrilled to pay you a whole lot more than what the government does right now.

Thank you for reconsidering your ill-advised regulations on data.

-Alex

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